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ABSTRACT

Faculty members who want a voice in textbook selection but whose schedules are already overburdened with meetings can still participate in textbook selection. A 7-stage process for involving all faculty in the textbook selection process has been used effectively twice in a large communication fundamentals course program at a state university and once in a small program at a private college. Steps in the process are: (1) the director of the textbook selection committee prepares a clear course description; (2) the director solicits ideas from all faculty members about the characteristics they find important in the textbooks; (3) the director develops a tentative list of criteria for selection and circulates it among faculty members; (4) the director assembles the textbooks that are viable choice; (5) the director evaluates all the books against the basic criteria; (6) the texts remaining are identified for all committee members; and (7) the director schedules a meeting at which all faculty involved in selection discuss the relative merits of the texts. The final selection is one which includes input from all affected faculty; and their strong voices in the actual selection increase the likelihood that they will be satisfied. (Sample faculty surveys of textbook criteria and text features, and a textbook review form are attached.) (RS)

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Making the Reorganization of the Former U.S.S.R. Look Easy: Faculty Participation in Textbook Selection

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Making the Reorganization of the Former U.S.S.R. Look Easy: Faculty Participation in Textbook Selection

Abstract

For faculty members who want a voice in textbook selection but whose schedules are already overburdened with meetings, this paper proposes a seven stage process for inviting and incorporating faculty views into the process of textbook selection. The organizational skills of the director of the course or head of the selection committee allow faculty members to suggest criteria and possible texts, evaluate relative merits of texts, and ultimately make a group decision about the most appropriate textbook. The seven stages are designed to increase faculty voice without necessitating unnecessary meetings. Institutions that have used this method have reported ease of administration and faculty satisfaction with the results.

Making the Reorganization of the Former U.S.S.R. Look Easy: Faculty Participation in Textbook Selection

Faculty battles over turf are common. Faculty strife about scheduling is the norm. Faculty dissension regarding promotion and tenure is ubiquitous. And democratic faculty decisions about textbook selection are legend. Although these historical areas of faculty disagreement are probably all beyond the scope of any brief paper for solutions, the problems that arise from faculty participation in decisions about textbook selection seem more modest. They have not, however, been the focus of any serious inquiry. A survey of publications related to course administration and pedagogy uncovered no writings on this topic whatsoever. This paper, therefore, identifies typical approaches used by universities to deal with textbook selection and proposes an assertive approach to including faculty views in the decisions. Because most textbook selections that involve faculty committees focus on books for basic courses, that type of multiple sectioned course will be the focus of the process that this paper recommends.

Departments address the problems associated with disagreement about textbooks for multiple sectioned courses using one of three approaches: a) they permit individual faculty members to order whatever books they want, b) they insist that textbook selections for multiple section classes be made by a committee of all those who teach the course, or c) the course director selects the particular texts for all faculty teaching a particular course. There are specific problems associated with each of these approaches.

First, departments where all individual faculty members select their textbooks for required basic courses independently often find that such a process undermines departmental efforts for course consistency. Required

courses are usually designed to meet curricular needs for various departments, and individual textbook selection allows the possibility for wide variation in *topic coverage* by different instructors. One instructor may select a text that gives extensive coverage to public speaking while another instructor in the same course may give only cursory coverage of that topic, and their textbook selections may reflect that difference. Moreover, individual textbook selection can contribute to wide fluctuation in *course difficulty* level. If one textbook introduces material at a high school reading level while another presents it at the 300-level, advisers may have difficulty counseling students about appropriate timing for taking the course. Individual textbook selection can also lead to *idiosyncratic coverage* in a course that is very likely a prerequisite for subsequent courses. Instructors in those higher level courses need to be able to know that certain topics have been taught in all sections of the course, and idiosyncratic choices about teaching might undermine that expectation. Finally, allowing individual instructors to select textbooks may contribute to *logistical problems* with bookstore orders. Instead of one large order that needs to be submitted to meet a deadline, an entire faculty may be submitting separate orders. The likelihood of missed orders increases. If numerous different texts are adopted, students may also have more difficulty finding used texts and/or selling their own texts to others. A more standardized selection system will not necessarily solve all these problems, but it will minimize problems with consistency and administration.

A second approach to textbook selection is one that mandates that all faculty be involved in the textbook selection. The biggest problem with this method is simple: it takes too much time. Faculty members are already heavily scheduled with committee meetings, and a textbook selection process that necessitates an additional series of meetings to propose, evaluate, talk about,

and ultimately select the text will be resisted. In fact, many faculty may simply refuse to participate because of the excessive demands that it places on their schedules. Finally, a group decision may, in some circumstances, politicize the decision. If there are faculty factions on the committee, they may not be willing to participate authentically in dialogue about the best book for the course. A textbook selection committee can actually continue and intensify "turf fights" that may be ongoing in the department.

A plausible alternative to these problems is to ask the course director to make the decision individually. In fact, such an approach is very common in many departments. Limiting the decision to one faculty member leads to a predictable problem: *exclusion from the decision means less commitment* to it.[1] This exclusion creates less of a problem for multiple section courses that are staffed with many teaching assistants who often appreciate the standard syllabus and mandated text; but it is a serious problem for courses staffed with a mixture of experienced full-time and part-time faculty, administrators, and teaching assistants. These faculty members, often well established in their approaches to the course, may want to control every aspect of the course including textbook selection. For them, a mandated textbook choice is insulting. A second problem with the text being chosen by the course director is that the person may, for a variety of reasons, make a *poor choice*. For example, the director may be persuaded by a particularly effective book representative to choose a text that is not well suited for the course. The director's choice might reflect idiosyncratic preferences such as treatment of a particular "favorite" topic, even though that topic might not be central to the effective presentation of the course material. Because careful review of all available texts requires extensive

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[1]Erez, Miriam, and Kanfer, Frederick H. "The role of goal acceptance in goal setting and task performance," *Academy of Management Review*, 8 (1983), p. 455.

in-depth reading, the director might necessarily evaluate some books superficially or select a text on its reputation rather than its suitability for the course. Finally, the director may have a *poor sense of how the course really takes shape* in the classrooms. If the director does not spend considerable time observing in actual classrooms, the selected text may not reflect the teaching preferences and philosophies of the faculty.

Despite the problems associated with individual, group, and director based textbook selection decisions, many departments want to involve faculty effectively in the decisions. They want to maintain reasonable control over course content and teaching approach and simultaneously adopt a less autocratic approach to textbook selection. To do this they need to involve a wide base of faculty members in the textbook selection process. Such participation in decision making, widely discussed in popular business writing,[2] is not a new idea. For many departments, however, it seems revolutionary.

A fairly straightforward procedure allows this revolutionary old notion to work, even in departments whose organizational history does not include such a process. This process has been used effectively, twice in a large fundamentals course program at a state university and once in a small program at a private college. The resulting textbook selection found wider support among faculty at those institutions than any other previous methods that had been used. Faculty members expressed more understanding of the criteria, more agreement with selection criteria, appreciation for the relatively low time consumed in the process, and ultimately more commitment to and enthusiasm about the choice than before. The process has seven basic steps.

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[2]Collingwood, Harris." With its ESOP, Avis tries even harder," *Business Week*, May 15, 1989, p. 122; Ouchi, W., *Theory Z: How American Business can Meet the Japanese Challenge* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1981).

Process of Decision Making

1. The director of the textbook selection committee (often the director of the multiple section course for which the book is being selected) prepares a clear course description. This description is often an amplification of the description that appears in the university bulletin. If the course is a service course for other departments, this description allows the director to identify clearly the essential components of the course. This description is not a "wish list" about the course, but it is an accurate and realistic description. All faculty members involved in the textbook selection receive a copy of this description. The director of the selection committee lists specific topics that must be included in the course and that, consequently, must also be treated in a textbook. This list also circulates among committee members (no meeting is necessary) for their suggestions about additions, deletions, and other modifications (See Appendix A). The director then assembles a revised listing, incorporating pertinent suggestions, which is used through the rest of the selection process.

2. The director solicits ideas from all faculty members involved in the process about other characteristics they find important in the textbook they will be adopting. They may offer suggestions about such things as length, typography, cost, hard versus soft cover, use of cartoons & photographs, treatment of particular topics, availability of ancillary materials (e.g. instructors' manual, test bank, activities manual, overhead transparencies, sample speeches), readability, and other issues (See Appendix B). Where patterns emerge in this information from faculty members, the director develops a list of important preferences. If the suggestions include contradictory advice, the director either discusses the disagreement directly with the parties who differ or individually makes a decision about which suggestion to use.

3 The director of the textbook selection committee develops a tentative list of criteria for selection and circulates that list among all the committee members for suggestions and modification. This criteria list can include any variables pertinent to the selection process for that institution: cost, availability, recency, coverage of particular topics, readability, attractiveness, inclusion of specific issues, balance of coverage suitable for the particular course, author reputation, accuracy of information, sample materials, accuracy and comprehensiveness of the index, organization, and any other relevant issues. After faculty members have had an opportunity to read and consider the list, the selection committee meets to discuss criteria and to agree on the final ones that will be considered in the selection process.

4. The director assembles the textbooks that are viable choices for selection. In an introductory level class, these contenders may number as many as fifteen. For more advanced courses which have multiple sections, only three or four suitable texts may be available. The director lists these texts by name and seeks additional suggestions about textbooks from members of the textbook selection committee. The director requests examination copies of all books for all members of the selection committee.

5. The director, using the checklist on which all substantive criteria have been listed, evaluates *all* the books against the basic criteria. This initial screening allows fairly easy removal of many books from consideration. If, for example, the course requirement includes extensive treatment of small group problem solving, any books that do not cover that area can be eliminated from further consideration. All faculty involved in the selection process are invited to participate in this initial screening. Experience demonstrates that they usually do not choose to participate because the screening process is time consuming and tedious.

6. When the director has completed the initial screening, the remaining texts are identified for all committee members. They are also placed where faculty members have easy access to them. If publishers cooperate, individual copies for each faculty member will be made available. All faculty then use the criteria checklists to evaluate the textbooks. In addition to noting the presence of particular topical coverage, this evaluation also includes assessment of the quality of the coverage (See Appendix C). Faculty members complete criteria forms for all the books they examine. These forms can be circulated with the texts so that faculty can read one another's comments and notes.

7. After all members and the director have examined and commented on all the finalist textbooks, the director schedules a meeting at which all faculty involved in selection discuss the relative merits of the texts. If faculty have read the books carefully and commented on them in response to the agreed upon criteria checklists, a final decision about the most appropriate choice is often surprisingly easy. Because participation has been high from all members of the selection committee throughout the entire process, few will introduce new "agenda" items at this final meeting. Following careful discussion, the group selects the new textbook. When this process has been used in the institutions described earlier, this final selection was an "emergent" decision[3] that reflected concensus about the most suitable textbook.

Merits of the Process

This brief seven stage process affords many advantages. First, it invites and uses ideas from all faculty who are involved in the textbook selection. The participation that it mandates is not superficial: faculty ideas are solicited, incorporated into all selection documents, and discussed in the final meeting.

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[3]Fisher, Aubrey, "Decision emergence: Phases in group decision making," *Speech Monographs* 37 (1970), pp. 53-66.

Second, the process simultaneously maximizes faculty input while minimizing meetings. That faculty members have too many meetings to attend goes without saying. This process affords input and dialogue without excessive meetings. Only when direct interaction and decision making are needed does this procedure require a meeting. Third, this process uses the organizational and leadership talents of the director of the course efficiently. The person most directly affected by the ultimate textbook selection works directly on all aspects of the procedure. The director can, therefore, control the speed of the selection process; make initial screening decisions; and keep the faculty committee members on task. Fourth, the method by its very nature undercuts the basis for faculty dissatisfaction and complaining. Because faculty ideas are invited and incorporated into the decision throughout all seven stages, faculty voices are built into the final decision. Fifth, the method provides a more democratic, participatory approach to decision making. In academic units where university bureaucracy often mandates autocratic decisions, inroads of democracy are important. Sixth, the method combines the time efficiency of individual choice with the higher quality decisions associated with group problem solving. Finally, the decision that results from such a method is one which all faculty members can endorse. The final selection is one which has included input from all affected faculty; and their strong voice in the actual selection increases the likelihood that they will be satisfied with the result.

Summary

Sometimes, faculty participation in decisions like textbook selection can be cumbersome and demoralizing. When it uses a method such as this one which is coordinated by a faculty member but which does not place excessively heavy meeting attendance on faculty it can be energizing and efficient.

Moreover, it can result in textbook selection which is ultimately endorsed enthusiastically by all faculty.

Appendix A

SAMPLE

General Survey for Textbook Criteria (Text Content)

Directions: The textbook selection process needs your input! Please complete this form and return it by February 1.

I. Course Description

COM 114: Fundamentals of Speech Communication: A study of communication theories applied to speech: practical communicative experiences ranging from interpersonal communication and small gorup process through problem identificaiton and solution in discussion, to informative and persuasive speaking in standard speaker audience situations.

II. Text Content

Indicate the topics that you think the text MUST incude in each of the following areas. Also indicate the topics that you PREFER the text include in each of the following areas. Please be as specific as possible. Your answers will be incorporated into the criteria form used to evaluate the textbooks.

A. Introduction and Basic Communication Processes:

B. Interpersonal Communication

C. Group Discussion and Problem Solving

D. Informative and Persuasive Public Speaking

III. Possible Texts for Review

Please list any texts that you have used or surveyed that you would like to have included in the review process. The course director will obtain copies of all suggested texts for faculty review. Please give the title, author, and publisher if you know them.

1.

2.

3.

Appendix B

SAMPLE

General Survey for Textbook Criteria Form
Text Features and Ancillaries

Faculty: Please strength our textbook selection process by completing this form and returning it by February 15.

I. General Text Features: Please indicate your suggestions with regard to the following general features of the text.

Length (number of chapters & number of pages):

Typography:

Readability Level (Low, Mid-low, Middle, Mid-High, High):

Cost:

Hard versus Soft Cover:

Please comment on any other general text features that you consider important for our consideration:

II. In Text Features: Please indicate the importance of the presence of the following in text features to you.

1 = Not important
2 = Somewhat important
3 = Very important

Chapter summaries _____
Chapter objectives _____
Student exercises _____
Quotations _____
Boxes, Charts _____
Discussion questions _____
Chapter outlines _____

Vocabulary lists _____
Cartoons _____
Photographs _____
Marginalia _____
Dialogues _____

III. Ancillary Materials: Please indicate the importance of the availability of the following ancillary textbook materials to you.

1 = Not important
2 = Somewhat important
3 = Very important

Instructors' manual _____
Multiple choice questions _____
Sample speeches _____
Computer test bank _____
Short answer questions _____
Essay questions _____
Instructional videos _____
Sample speech videos _____
Overhead transparencies _____
Class activities manual _____
Student workbook _____

Please indicate any other ancillary materials you consider important:

IV. Criteria Hierarchy: Please indicate, in order of important the five features of the text that you consider most important in this text.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Appendix C

SAMPLE

Textbook Review Form

Faculty: Please complete a form for each book under review. Please complete your reviews of the three finalist texts before our meeting on April 1.

I. Text Features: Please indicate the strengths and weakness of the text in the following areas:

Price:

Readability:

Chapter Objectives:

Cartoons/Photos:

Discussion Questions:

Student Exercises:

Instructors' Manual:

Test Questions:

II. Text Content: Please indicate the strengths and weakness of the text in the following areas:

Overall Book Organization:

Coverage & Treatment of Basic Communication Processes:

Coverage & Treatment of Interpersonal Communication:

Coverage and Treatment of Group Communication:

Coverage and Treatment of Public Speaking:

III. Text Selection Recommendation: Please indicate whether you think this text should be adopted. Please indicate your reasons for your recommendation.